

Homeless and Runaway Youth

The Problem

Homelessness among young people is a serious problem. Homeless youth, often referred to as unaccompanied youth, are youth under the age of 18 who are not being cared for by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or foster parent. These youth do not have a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The National Runaway Safeline estimates that on any given night there are approximately 1.3 million homeless youth living unsupervised on the streets, in abandoned buildings, with friends, or with strangers. Unaccompanied runaway and homeless youth are at higher risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health problems, substance abuse, and death. **It is estimated that 5,000 unaccompanied youth die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide.**

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Yearly Comparison Report of Homeless Student Enrollment, the number of homeless unaccompanied youth in Dane County is increasing.

2015 Dane County Youth Assessment

- 832 students in grades 9-12 reported being kicked out of home by their parents within the last 12 months
- 740 students in grades 9-12 reported running away from home in the last 12 months
- 324 students in grades 9-12 reported being homeless during the last 12 months

The Research

Studies have shown that:

1. One in seven young people between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away
2. Youth ages 12 to 17 are more at risk for becoming homeless than adults
3. 75% of runaways are female
4. Over 50% of homeless youth report that their parents knew of or facilitated their exit from the family home

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5. Approximately 1 in 3 youth will be approached for sex in exchange for money, food, shelter, or drugs within 48 hours of leaving home
6. Runaway and homeless females ages 14-17 have pregnancy rates of 48% compared to 10% for those who are housed
7. 75% of homeless and runaway youth have already or will drop out of school
8. 46% of runaway and homeless youth reported being physically abused, 38% reported being emotionally abused, and 17% reported being sexually abused by a family or household member
9. 20 - 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ

Addressing the Needs in Madison and Dane County

Briarpatch has been providing services to runaway and homeless youth and their families since 1971. These services currently include: assessment; individual, family, and group counseling; case management; outreach; a 24-hour help-line; and temporary shelter. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program has the following primary objectives:

- Provide a safe non-judgmental environment for youth to get off the streets
- Help youth remain in or re-connect with school and/or job skills training
- Assist youth in returning home or with obtaining other safe housing
- Connect youth and families with other resources they may need
- Prevent youth from developing a long-term pattern of homelessness

Service Location

All of the aforementioned services are provided at the Briarpatch Youth Services facility located at 2720 Rimrock Road in Madison with counseling and case management services also provided at other locations in the community.

Contact Information

For more information, please contact the Briarpatch 24-hour help-line at 608-251-1126 or toll free at 800-798-1126.